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A Further Replication of "Is Form-Focused Vocabulary Instruction Worthwhile?"

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Abstract: Story Listening, a form of instruction that aims to provide optimal input for language acquisition (Krashen, 2020), involves the telling of traditional stories that the teacher makes comprehensible by drawing pictures on the board and providing quick L1 translations. Mason and Krashen (2004) discovered that learners acquired vocabulary more efficiently through Story Listening alone than by supplementing it with form-focused vocabulary instruction. Clarke (2019) reported a replication of this study with similar results. This paper reports a second, larger-scale replication. Twenty-nine English majors at a Japanese college received one of two treatments during one ninety-minute class period: the story-only group just listened to a story for around 25 minutes, while the story-plus-study group listened to the same story and subsequently engaged in explicit study of 30 test words which had occurred in the story text. This explicit study included quizzing using flashcards, using the test words to produce sentences orally and listening to definitions. Although the story-plus-study group outperformed the story-only group on an immediate post-test, they actually underperformed on a surprise delayed post-test five weeks later. Whereas in previous studies, learners in the story-plus-study groups were shown to acquire vocabulary less efficiently

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(although they gained more words overall on the delayed post-test), in this study the positive effect of the supplementary explicit instruction had disappeared five weeks later. The efficiency value for the story-only treatment was broadly similar to the original study and first replication, with values close to 0.2 words per minute.

Keywords: Story Listening, vocabulary acquisition.

Introduction

Story Listening is a type of L2 instruction developed by ProfessorBeniko Mason based on the implications ofthe Input hypothesis (Krashen, 1985).It aims to provide optimal input for language acquisition (Krashen, 2020).

Teachers tell their studentstraditional storiesand make them comprehensible through Comprehension-Aiding Supplementation (CAS) (Krashen, Mason & Smith, 2018). CAS includes the teacherdrawing pictures on the board to explain unknown vocabulary items andproviding quick L1 translations or explanations.

Mason and Krashen (2004) concluded thatstory listening done in this way was a far more efficient way to learn vocabulary than by supplementing the listening to a story with explicit vocabulary study.Clarke (2019) replicated their study and reported similar results. This study presents a second replication, involving a larger number of subjects than the first.

1. Methodology

The subjects were 29 first- and second-year English majors at a Japanese junior college. Four regular, weekly classes taught by the author received one of two different treatments. Two classes were “story-only” groups (n=7 and n=8) and two other classes were “story-plus-study” groups (n=6 and n=8). The treatment for the story-only groups followed the procedure outlined below.

(1) Subjects took a pre-testcontaining a list of 30 English words that the instructor believed the students might not know.The subjects were instructed to write the L1 translation next to each word. This took 5 minutes.

(2) Immediately after taking the pre-test, the subjects then listened to a story (The Frog Prince), which contained the test words. The teacher told the story in English (25 minutes) and used CAS to make the story comprehensible. Subjects were allowed to write notes on the meaning of the target words on note paper.

(3) The subjects then took the first post-test (the second post-test is described below), which included the same words as the pre-test, but in a different order. Looking at notes was not allowed. The test took 5 minutes.

For the story-plus-study groups, the three steps described above were repeated, but the treatment was extended after the first post-test:

(4) The teacher elicited the target words from the subjects by using flashcards which contained the target word on one sideand either a picture representing the meaning or an L1 translation on the other. This took 5 minutes.

(5) Subjects were put into pairs. After shuffling the cards, subjectsquizzed each other to elicit the target words. This took 10 minutes.

(6) After changing pairs, subjects were told totake turns picking up a flashcard, thinking of a sentence using the target word that related to the story and saying it to their partner. This output task took 10 minutes.

(7) The teacher presented English definitions of some of the target words orally and elicited the correcttarget words from the whole class. This took 5 minutes.

(8) The subjects played the traditional Japanese game ‘karuta’. All the flashcards were laid on the desk with the target words on the underside, and the teacher called out the target words. The subjects tried to be the first in their pair to pick up the appropriate card and thereby collect the most cards. This took 5 minutes.

(9) The subjects worked in pairs again and used the flashcards to review all the target words oncemore. This took 4 minutes.

(10) At the end of the class period, the subjects retook the same translation test as in step 3. (This was the second post-test.)

All subjects, regardless of treatment, were given a surprise test of the target words five weeks later. The order of the items in this test was different from the pre-test and first (or second) post-test conducted on the day of the treatment.

The procedure used here for the story-plus-study groups differed slightly from the procedure used in the original study (Mason & Krashen, 2004) and from the first replication (Clarke, 2019), but it is broadly similar because students were focused on explicitly learning the form and the meaning of the target words in input- and output-based activities. The total amount of time spent on each treatment was 25 minutes for the story-only group and 69 minutes for the story-plus-study groups, although it should be noted that this does not include time spent on testing. It may be argued that test-taking may have primed the subjects to learn the words or given them more exposure to the target vocabulary, a point which will be returned to later.

When marking the pre- and post-tests, some leniency was shown with regard to the grammatical properties of the words. If the English word printed on the test paper was an adjective, but the subject wrote the L1 translation in the noun form of the word, for example, the answer was marked correct. Thus, the main criteria for deeming a word to be correct or not was whether its core meaning was reflected in the L1 translation provided by the subject.

It should be noted that the subjects in all groups took 5 or 6 English classes per week, and the treatment occurred in only one of their classes, so the issue of contamination cannot be completely ignored when interpreting the results. It is possible that some of the subjects may have met the target words in other classes between the time when they received the treatment and the delayed post-test, but this applies equally to all subjects. It is not the case that subjects in one group were more likely to meet the words elsewhere than those in any other group, and therefore contamination was not recognized as a major threat to the validity of the findings.

2. Results

Since identical Story Listening treatments were administered to the two story-only groups, their results were combined and the overall mean is presented in Table 1. The two story-plus-study groups received identical Story Listening plus supplementary study treatments, so their results were also combined.

*Table 1*Mean test scores (perfect score = 30)& standard deviations

	pre-test	1st post-test	2nd post-test	delayed post-test
Story-only group mean	6.40 (3.78)	20.67 (5.33)	-	11.00 (4.78)
Story-plus-study group mean	3.29 (1.68)	17.14 (4.75)	25.43 (4.77)	7.64 (3.03)

The 1st post-test mean scores were not close to the maximum 30 points, meaning that the subjects were not able to acquire all the target items just from listening to the story.This result was also true of the original study (Krashen & Mason, 2004) and other earlier studies of Story Listening (e.g. Mason, 2005; Mason et al., 2009). The number of words acquiredby both groups on the 1st post-test was similar: 14.27 (48% of the total) for the story-only group and 13.85 (46% of the total) for the story-plus-study group. These gains are similar to the corresponding 46.5% and 52% gains in the original study (Mason & Krashen, 2004), but slightly lower thanthe 54% and 65% gains in the first replication (Clarke, 2019).

After doing the supplementary explicit vocabulary exercises, the story-plus-study group meanincreased from 17.14 to 25.43, or 85% of the total words, indicating that the extra study had some positive effect. This effect was only short-term, however, because scores on the delayed post-test felldramatically.It is striking that despite having had much more exposure to the words during the treatment, the story-plus-study group actually retained far fewer words on the delayed post-test (7.64) than the story-plus-study group (11.0). This result is contrary to those in the previous studies in which the story-plus-study group outperformed the story-only group on the delayed post-test(Mason & Krashen, 2004; Clarke, 2019).

As in the previous studies, the efficiency (words learned per minute of class time spent on the treatment) of the story-only group treatment was superior (table 2).

*Table 2*Efficiency of Treatments (words learned per minute)

	1st post-test	2nd post-test	delayed post-test
Story-only	0.57	-	0.18
Story-plus-study	0.55	0.35	0.07

3. Discussion

The story-only group acquired vocabulary more efficiently than the story-plus-study group. In this and the two previous studies, the efficiency values for the story-only groups have consistently been close to 0.2 words per minute (Table 3).

*Table 3*Efficiency Values in the Three Studies to Date (words learned per minute)

	story-only	story plus study
Mason and Krashen,2004	0.25	0.16
XXXX, 2019	0.19	0.11
The present study	0.18	0.07

The efficiency of the story-plus-study treatment waslower than in the previous studies, because as noted above, thepositive effect of the supplementary vocabulary activitieson the second post-test had largely disappeared five weeks later. This result casts doubt onthe value of the explicit vocabulary instruction conducted in this study.

It was mentioned earlier that test-taking may have primed the subjects to focus on the target words and aided their learning.However, in this study theextra exposure to the words during test-taking did not benefit the story-plus-study group on the delayed post-test and therefore concern for including this time in the calculations is not merited.

4. Conclusion and Suggestions

For the third time, it has been found that supplementinglistening to a story with extra, explicit vocabulary study is not an efficient use of class time: just listening to a story brought better results. This study was small-scale and was conducted with English majors who were exposed to varying levels of input before the delayed post-test. Despite these limitations, this study gives further credence to the belief that Story Listening is a superior way to promote language acquisition in the L2 classroom.

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